



## RICE CREEK READING CORNER

– Rice Creek Watershed District

### **When it Rains, It Stores! Resurrected Rain Barrels Reduce Run-off and Conserve Water**

#### The Water Pollution Problem

Non-point source pollution is our nation's number one water quality problem. *Non-point source pollution* refers to *many contributing sources of pollution* such as fertilizer, pet waste, oil, leaves, grass clippings, etc. whereas *point source pollution* refers to pollution that can be traced back to *one particular source* such as a factory pipe. In natural landscapes, rain tends to soak into the ground gradually. However, in urban and suburban traditional developments, much of the land is covered by impervious surfaces - such as streets, parking lots and roofs - where the water cannot soak into the ground. Instead, the water runs-off rapidly carrying the numerous non-point pollutants it collects along the way into our water bodies.

#### Simple Solutions

A solution to non-point pollution is to reduce the amount of water flowing over impervious surfaces. There are many ways to encourage water to soak into the ground instead of running off; rain gardens, rooftop gardens, pervious pavements and rain barrels are a few ideas.

#### Good Ol' Rain Barrels

Saving rainwater to use for watering or during dry months is an old practice that is becoming popular again. Harvesting systems vary from a simple barrel under a down-spout to high tech systems using cisterns, pumps and flow controls. The simple method usually uses a row of barrels connected by hoses and uses gravity to transfer the overflow into the next barrel and a spigot to get the water out.

Manufactured rain barrels are sold at many garden stores, vary in cost from about \$60-150 and come in various looks and sizes. Handy people can convert a used drum into a rain barrel for a nominal cost.



#### *Benefits of Rain Barrels*

- Saves money on your water bill by providing free rainwater for your lawn and garden
- Decreases volume of polluted storm water run-off reaching water bodies
- Saves tax dollars by reducing or delaying the need to expand or upgrade sewage treatment facilities
- Reduces the severity of basement flooding caused by sewer back-up
- Diverts water away from your foundation

#### Keep in Mind

The rainwater inlet should be screened so mosquitoes CANNOT enter nor breed. Screens also keep out materials such as leaves that provide nutrients for algal growth and covers keep out the sun. If screens and cover fit properly, algal growth is not a problem. Rain barrels are not suggested for houses with treated cedar shakes or roofing materials containing asbestos. The gutter systems should not have lead solder or lead-based paint.

Is your house right for a rain barrel or two? Do your part for water quality and install one when you're gearing up for spring!